

**National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's
National Marine Fisheries Service**

***Sustainable Fisheries Leadership Awards
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**Guest Speaker – Chris Fischer
Founder/CEO, Fischer Productions, Inc.
And host of ESPN's "Offshore Adventures"**

Hello, my name is Chris Fischer. I would like thank NOAA and NMFS along with Scott Smullen for inviting me to be here this evening.

As a boy growing up in KY, learning to fish for bluegill and bass, I quickly became all consumed with fishing. Most days starting in grade school, two of my friends and I would be dropped off at a farm pond or small river outside Louisville and we would fish until dark. The countless days walking through the woods to a hidden creek to catch a fish shaped us into men that had a passion for all of our outdoor resources.

My father always made time for days on the water when I was a child and still does to this day. It seemed that our parents understood the value in exposing us to nature for our development, along with the understanding that they were shaping young men to carry an understanding of Conservation into the future.

My wife Melissa and I feel strongly about exposing our daughter, Sarah, and future children to the outdoors. It seems to be part of the basic needs for a person to have some connection to nature and the outdoors. It can create balance and peace in ones life. It's amazing to me that those experiences provided by our parents have lead us to this place.

In 1999 Melissa and I were fishing and free diving like you see on "Offshore Adventures" today. A couple of years of traveling the Pacific Coasts of CA and Baja had been the time of our lives but we felt it may be coming to an end due to the expense of it all.

At that time, I was looking for a new business opportunity and getting prepared for what I thought would be one of the saddest days of my life, selling the *Go Fisch (FV)*. Then I thought to myself, perhaps I should develop a business around the boat and attempt to get someone else to pay for it. At that moment, Fischer Productions was born and we embarked on the journey of a life time.

All of us on the *Go Fisch* feel blessed and fortunate to be able to combine our lifelong passions for angling, free diving and enjoying fresh seafood - with our professional work producing three television shows on ESPN. These shows focus on the joys of experiencing our oceans up close and personal. It all

started with “Offshore Adventures” and our goal / our mission was simply: TO BRING THE WORLDS OCEANS INTO PEOPLE’S HOMES.

After 6 years of traveling the Eastern Pacific, we are going global. We are embarking on a new worldwide television adventure. We will be expanding our operations to use a mother ship – previously an Alaskan king crab vessel – to take us beyond the Americas to the locations like Palmyra Island, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ghana, Ascension Island, the Azores and Madeira. We will be focusing on the great angling and diving opportunities afforded by these remote locations. We also intend to combine science and conservation advocacy into the show as we try to look objectively at issues like fish abundance, tagging efforts, floating marine debris, tuna ranching, and the live reef fish and ornamental fish trades. We intend to bring to our viewers both sides of these issues – the good and the bad – to expand our audience’s appreciation for what astounding delights our oceans still afford and the problems that may threaten.

We feel important that a personal commitment to Stewardship is our responsibility. I have been able to expand our stewardship role as a member of the Board of Directors of The Billfish Foundation. This experience along with our close contact with our seas and marine life has lead to an understanding of the complexity and marvel of this planet’s ecosystems.

The United States is the nation that is best equipped, both institutionally and scientifically, to properly manage marine resources. We have a thirty year history of good law to guide our fisheries managers. We have an open and transparent system of regional fishery management councils and advisory bodies to assist our delegations to the international RFMOs, or Regional Fishery Management Organizations.

Despite this well organized system we can see – as highlighted in the **Pew Oceans Report** and other reviews that we still have a long way to go to provide a well balanced set of conservation and management programs that will maximize the economic value of these resources, protect endangered and threatened species and manage harvests on a sustainable and productive level.

America can improve in these respects, and we can also use both our knowledge and international political influence to shape improvements in marine fisheries management among the world’s RFMOs.

We need more research on the biology and demographics of this planets apex marine predators. This nation can do a better job at fisheries data collection and stock assessment and population research. We need to understand entrenched economic relationships. Information in these areas might reveal the best approaches to manage marine fisheries for the maximum benefit of the nation.

The Billfish Foundation is funding a multi-national socio-economic study looking at the impact of sportfishing tourism in Mexico and several Central American nations. Similar work in this nation could help provide a strong basis for showing many of the less developed nations in the world that good conservation can be good economics. **There are alternatives** to the harvesting tactics that are threatening many stocks – Eastern Bluefin tuna being an example that comes quickly to mind.

Sensible allocation decisions that distribute allowable harvests among gear types and sectors can maximize benefits and minimize negative environmental impacts. This should form the basis for sound management.

The United States has in the past half century successfully utilized our influence in the international arena to dramatically affect the conservation of marine mammals. Working with the International Whaling Commission we reversed a century of uncontrolled harvest of large whales. We worked with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission to nearly eliminate the loss of dolphins to purse seine gear that was targeting tuna.

This success occurred in large part because our government responded to the strong desire of most Americans to protect these grand creatures. Unfortunately, with the single exception being the ban on the use of large scale drift gillnets secured through the United Nations, we seldom see the same political influence brought to bear on nations that fish the high seas flagrantly violating existing fishing controls, using destructive gear types, or operating with inadequate international management controls.

The United States should use her political and economic influence to place pressure on key nations within RFMOs that traditionally resist management actions. This is necessary to recover depleted stocks and prevent other stocks from becoming overfished. Trade sanctions and economic incentives based on foreign aid could provide us with strong tools to force these issues if we were politically committed to doing so.

I and many others think it is important to begin basing our management goals on the future. We must be willing to work towards shaping the resources to meet the needs of future generations, not simply to react to the immediate needs of special interest groups. In this respect the initiatives undertaken by NOAA and the NMFS to look towards ecosystems management approaches is laudable.

Having said all this that there have been great successes proving that it is possible to rationally and successfully manage marine fish stocks in a complex ecological and political environment. The recovery of Atlantic swordfish is a prime example of this and one hopes that someday we will be able to say the same about blue and white marlin.

I am not one who chooses to align with the camp that promotes a doom and gloom perspective on the oceans' fish populations.

Yes, man has left a dramatic handprint on these stocks and we have probably permanently altered many aspects of these ecosystems. We should recognize this impact and use our technical skills to manage what exists today in the best possible sustainable manner. Conservation is the key – not a closed minded desire for pure preservation. There is a need for improvement but the world's seas are still full of delight and we should continue to be afforded opportunities to sample and enjoy this delight.

You here are the leaders most connected with preserving our resources - both at home and in the world's oceans. Future generations are counting on you to ensure that they have the ability to enjoy the resources that we all cherish. If there are issues or policies we can address or highlight as we travel around the world, we want to hear from you.

Please email me at ChrisFischer@FischerProductions.com so we can begin planning our journey around these objectives and opportunities in order to inform people throughout the world as they watch Offshore Adventures.

On behalf of my wife Melissa and the entire *Go Fisch* crew, I would like to encourage you all to get out, discover the World Offshore, and be responsible Stewards of the Sea.